

## Document Citation

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Author(s)	William K. Everson
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LAND OF LIBERTY (Produced and compiled by Cecil B. deMille, 1939) 85 mins app.

"Land of Liberty" is fascinating on a number of levels. First of all, it was made primarily for exhibition at the NY World's Fair in 1939 (and was shown too at the San Francisco fair which overlapped). It was designed to show the history of America and its people - partly from documentary footage, but largely via excerpts from hundreds of Hollywood films. Although the industry had pitched in before for periodic back-patting shorts to push the coming season's releases, this was the first time that all of the producers had collaborated for a basically non-commercial documentary project. (In later years the matter of legal rights, residuals and other factors would have made such a film a tremendously complicated project). Although many stars are involved and recognizable - John Barrymore, Claudette Colbert, Raymond Massey, Joel McCrea etc. - to its credit the film tries hard to downplay the film-clip modus operandi by using sequences <sup>in</sup> which key explanatory dialogue is delivered by supporting players (Clarence Kolb, John Litel). Thus a sense of a cavalcade of history - rather than film history - is maintained, and only when unavoidable (Massey playing Lincoln for example) is the focus on the stars. Obviously people who really knew film were involved in the editing process; the San Houston/Texas adventure is neatly put together from that same year's "Man of Conquest" and an obscure Columbia "B", "Heroes of the Alamo". When a film is less well-known, there is a tendency to use more of it; thus Republic's praiseworthy little "Hearts in Bondage" (directed by Lew Ayres) produces not only some Monitor vs Merrimac scenes, but also a touching little dramatic sequence in which Henry B. Walthall shines. Some films are handled via fairly large chunks, others via brief flashes -- all identifiable except (for me at least) a mysterious long-shot clip of Edward G. Robinson as some kind of rabble-rouser that I just can't place. The earlier sections tend to be a little school-roomy since there's a relative paucity of film on the American revolution, and the compilation fell back heavily on those propagandist shorts made by Warner Brothers from 1939 through 1941. It's interesting to see Fox allowing the use of lengthy clips from "Drums Along the Mohawk" before the film, one of their big 1939 films, was actually in release. So there's an obvious appeal to the film buff to spot all the excerpts used. On another level, it's interesting as a propagandist film. Europe was not yet officially at war when the film was planned, but it soon would be -- and representatives of foreign nations would all have their exhibits at the fair. The film clearly adopts a "Hands Off!" stance, re-establishes America's neutrality, but also pushes its military and economic strength as a further warning. deMille's own political stance is not underlined unduly, but it's certainly there, and some of the narration may raise a few eyebrows today. Indians get rather off-hand treatment as the commentary refers to "the white man pushing westward", and America's less admirable excursions - an invasion of Canada at one point, Mexico at another - are hurriedly covered up with a word or two. When the film opened at the Fair, it was over two hours long - felt to be too long for its own good as a film, and certainly too long for a fair that wanted rapid turnovers so that people could get out and spend money! It initially had a long introductory prologue by a history professor, which was soon edited out, along with earlier, more academic clips, and big chunks from films like "San Francisco" and "In Old Chicago" which were felt to be familiar anyway, and also, being about disasters, perhaps not upbeat enough for the closing portion of the film. The much-edited version also had a limited theatrical release, portions of the income being devoted to charity and British war relief, but exhibitors on the whole were not unduly interested in the film at the time. Most Hollywood companies in 1939 felt it their duty to make patriotic documentaries of this type, and in the case of Warners, saw it perhaps as a helpful way to solidify their almost boot-licking relationship with FDR. As a contrast, and immediately prior to "Land of Liberty", we'll be showing MGM's "Yankee Doodle Goes To Town", which does it all in one reel, via a mixture of new footage, stylised tableaux and stock footage, all neatly put together by Jacques Tourneur, on the verge of being promoted from shorts to features.



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LAND OF LIBERTY (1939, Produced by Cecil B. deMille)

Produced specifically for the 1939 World's Fair, this is a history of America told through clips from hundreds of famous (and some not-so-famous) Hollywood movies. Its political and racial comments (or lack of them) are as fascinating as the compilation itself, since the film also had the propagandist aim of reminding Europe of America's might and its determination not to be involved in the almost certain World War Two. One of the first major all-industry cooperative attempts at producing a compilation-documentary from its own footage, it has historical significance archivally, and you'll also have a lot of fun spotting, identifying and puzzling over the various excerpts. -- William K. EVERSON

Note: Film runs approx. 90 mins. We might add the 1939 MGM short YANKEE DOODLE GOES TO TOWN, directed by Jacques Tourneur, which attempts the same kind of thing in only ten minutes. The films do not conflict since the approach (and footage) is quite different.

LAND OF LIBERTY: As per promise last week, herewith a quick listing of the major sequences (excluding lesser-known shorts and documentaries) used in this compilation film.  
DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK: SCARLET LETTER: NORTHWEST PASSAGE: SONS OF LIBERTY: AMERICA: JANICE MEREDITH: OLD IRONSIDES: THE GREAT MEADOW: HEARTS DIVIDED: THE BARRIER: SLAVE SHIP: THE BUCCANNEER: VIVA VILLA: FATHER TAKES A WIFE: MOBY DICK: YANKEE CLIPPER: HEROES OF THE ALAMO: MAN OF CONQUEST: THE COVERED WAGON: FIGHTING CARAVANS: TIDES OF EMPIRE: SUTTER'S GOLD: THE PONY EXPRESS: WELLS FARGO: HONEY: ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN ILLINOIS: JEZEBEL: SO RED THE ROSE: HEARTS IN BONDAGE: VICTORIA THE GREAT: ABRAHAM LINCOLN: OF HUMAN HEARTS: RUGGLES OF RED GAP: THE PLAINSMAN: THE TEXANS: THE IRON HORSE: UNION PACIFIC: THE TEXAS RANGERS: HUCKLEBERRY FINN: ONE MAN'S JOURNEY: COME AND GET IT: VALLEY OF THE GIANTS: BLACK FURY: DIAMOND JIM: THE BOWERY: THIS IS MY AFFAIR: YELLOW JACK: ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT: CAVALCADE: SEVENTH HEAVEN: ARROWSMITH: ADVENTURES OF MARCO POLO: COAST TO COAST IN 48 HOURS: DEAD END: MY MAN GODFREY: CRIME SCHOOL: PUBLIC ENEMY'S WIFE: THE RIVER: PLOUGH THAT BROKE THE PLAINS: OUR DAILY BREAD: MEN MUST FIGHT: DAVID COPPERFIELD: ALEXANDER HAMILTON

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